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ABSTRACT

The media workshop and the media laboratory can fit meaningfully into the reforms of mass communication education, but there are distinct differences in their roles. The media workshop is a place where students can serve on-campus apprenticeships with a traditional media organization. The media laboratory is a futuristic media facility that encourages students to try new forms of media expression without the constraints of traditional industry practices and standards. Campuses that lack financial or staffing resources to create both might want to capitalize on the best aspects of a workshop and a laboratory in one media facility. One university campus has developed its over-the-air radio station that allows such a hybrid of the workshop and laboratory. The radio station is operated as a co-curricular arm of the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences. Of the approximately 160 students involved, no more than half are communication majors. Program blocks are reserved during each day for what are called "specialty shows." Information programming also allows students substantial opportunity to express themselves on issues they find relevant and significant. Public service and public affairs programs are part of the programming. Multimedia opportunities are being developed on campus with the growth of a new student cable television operation. Overall, the workshop overlay with laboratory form and content initiatives has proven successful in this particular university context and for this radio station. (RS)

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THE MEDIA WORKSHOP HYBRID IN MEDIA EDUCATION REFORM

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THE MEDIA WORKSHOP HYBRID IN MEDIA EDUCATION REFORM

The war to reform mass communication education will have to be waged on many fronts. Many aspects of mass communication education programs will need to be recast in order to force media study into its rightful place in the academic mainstream. Curricular matters, course content, and even the types of faculty to be hired must all come under close scrutiny as mass communication educators make the necessary conversion from industry-driven, professionally oriented programs to a liberalizing sort of media study that makes the campus community and its students the new focus. Porter, and other media scholars, have called for a move away from simply "training" students with entry level skills to broadly educating students for a lifetime, "taking into account the interrelationship of all media (Porter, p. 21; also see McCall, 1990, p. 9; and see Finney, p. 4)." Another key area for reevaluation is in the media facilities on a campus. It will be essential that the media hardware facilities effectively respond to and support the developing reforms.

The type and use of media facilities in a college environment will tell students, the media industries, and the rest of the academy a great deal about how mass communication study and practice are to be defined. Media hardware warehouses that dwell

on having only media majors master production practices dictated by the industry will soon be treated by administrators and cross-campus colleagues as dinosaurs with little to contribute to the academy as a whole. Worse yet is when media majors earn substantial course credit for their activity and practice in a campus media facility, thus depriving them of the opportunity to fill a college program with more substantial, conceptual study of the media. No doubt, various university constituencies should and will demand more from a campus media facility.

It would seem everyone agrees that students of media, both majors and non-majors, should have the opportunity to make practical applications with their hands on the media technology. Some advocates of pushing industry needs to the forefront of media education fear that a redirection of facility usage is a condemnation of any sort of hands-on application. But that fear is unfounded. Students of mediated messages today need to see how technology can be used to communicate effectively, perhaps in ways that go beyond accepted, current industry practices. So the question is not whether experience with media technology is allowable, but rather how it can best be utilized to help students better understand and communicate with that technology. Awareness and practice in current media industry processes should be only one part of that larger process. This paper, then, seeks to analyze how media facilities can function in the overall mass communication education reform process, and provide a relevant illustration of how a media facility on one campus exhibits reform characteristics.

MEDIA WORKSHOPS AND MEDIA LABORATORIES

Institutions have many options with how media facilities are structured on campuses. Blanchard and Christ have defined two particular types of centers in which students can make practical applications with media technology -- the media workshop and the media laboratory (Blanchard and Christ, p. 50). Both can meaningfully fit into the reforms of mass communication education, but there are distinct differences in their roles.

The media workshop is defined as a place where students can serve on-campus apprenticeships with a more traditional media organization. The media workshop allows students to operate a student media organization with the support and direction of a faculty advisor.

> Students are expected to apply their message making, media management, and media studies concepts and skills in solving problems facing the centers. This type of experiential capstone learning experience challenges students to move from theory to policy; from appreciation to application; from self-doubt to self-direction. (Blanchard and Christ, p. 99).

In this student media organization setting, students have the opportunity to implement industry practices and work within the forms those practices presume.

The media laboratory, meanwhile, is a more futuristic media facility that encourages students to try new forms of media expression without the constraints of traditional industry practices and standards. Students can develop more personalized

messages for a wide variety of audiences, challenging themselves and the technology to serve their own communication objectives.

> Instead of replicating the management and practitioner hierarchies..., the media laboratories reflect the entrepreneurial, democratic liberal ethos at its best. Advanced students can use the laboratory experience to experiment with ideas that are not normally associated with mainstream media communication. They integrate their interests, skills, and insights to creatively address a variety of communication challenges. (Blanchard and Christ, p. 99).

The media laboratory notion was also profiled in the media education report of the University of Oregon. The report says a laboratory can generate "...awareness and understanding for the capacities and differences of new technology ("Planning for Curricular Change," 1984, p. 60).

As indicated previously, both the workshop and the laboratory can fit nicely into media education reforms that focus on a liberalizing understanding of media while deemphasizing crass vocationalism. For one thing, access can and should be provided for both majors and non-majors in either setting. This allows the media facility to make a contribution to the cocurricular education of a variety of students. The media facility should also benefit by having the inputs and perspectives of students from other academic perspectives. Next, either the workshop or the laboratory can and should be operated as cocurricular ventures for little or no academic credit to the students involved. This clear signal to the rest of the campus community demonstrates that, while practice in media technology is important, it is not a substitute for the study of media concepts and theory that should rightfully be found

in curricular course offerings. Blanchard and Christ point out that this circumstance should be easily understood and appreciated by proponents of vocational training in media education. When students find their practical experience in a cocurricular fashion, "...they demonstrate their interests, initiative, and motivation -- attributes that cannot be taught in required, lock-step courses but that media practitioners profess to prize so highly (Blanchard and Christ, p. 71)."

Several other benefits are had when institutions avoid creating media facilities that cater only to "training" future media practitioners for the specific methods of the industry. First, less faculty time is needed to oversee and guarantee vocational and practical standards. When media technology familiarization is the goal, instead of professional competence, faculty can devote more time to the teaching of media processes, effects, and concepts. Universities can also avoid the urge to constantly update equipment to state-of-the-art standards. Again, when familiarization of process is the goal, technical competence on specific equipment is no longer essential. As Gullifor has so efficiently pointed out, technical wizardry on the most modern equipment might not make sense either from a university financial or learning process standpoint (Gullifor, p. 16). The Oregon Report also warns about the undesirability of an equipment emphasis that promotes "finely honed technical skills ("Planning for Curricular Change," p. 61)." The key is that both workshops and laboratories allow for students with initiative to achieve high

levels of technical competence, but that should not be the focus of either type of facility. One could easily question whether the practical, professional world and its standards can even be duplicated on the college campus, not to mention that a far better place for such skill development would be in an actual field internship placement.

WORKSHOP AND LABORATORY CONTINUUM

As helpful as the workshop and laboratory definitions are, neither must be implemented in a pure form to be effective. Practically speaking, many campuses will not have the financial or staffing luxury to create both a media workshop and a media laboratory. Those campuses might want to capitalize on the best aspects of a workshop and a laboratory in one media facility. In this sense, it is appropriate to define a single media facility as fitting somewhere into a continuum. As long as the media education reform objectives of media understanding and familiarization are maintained over simple practitioner proficiency, any number of hybrids are possible.

Obviously, the workshop approach, by focusing more on industry processes and values with accompanying forms of authorship, would tend to be of more immediate, practical use for students gearing up for specific media careers. But even in a single media organization, that should not rule out the potential for and need for promoting the characteristics of the laboratory -- opportunities for more personalized expressions, experimentation

with form, unique definitions of audience, etc. In fact, finding a merger of strengths in one facility can allow students the flexibility to experience industry processes while maintaining the permission to experiment with laboratory sorts of approaches. A student seeking career preparation has the chance to observe and participate in different forms. The experimentally minded students have the opportunity to see a direct contrast to the industry, while gaining experience that might be applicable in various media careers. It is important to note that workshops and laboratories need not be viewed as necessarily opposing forces. In fact, a hybrid media facility approach might provide a variety of faculty and students a place to collaborate and interact to the benefit of all parties.

WORKSHOP/LABORATORY IMPLEMENTATION IN A UNIVERSITY RADIO STATION

One particular university campus has developed its over-the-air radio station in a fashion that allows such a hybrid of the workshop and laboratory. The station essentially has a workshop overlay in that a traditional medium, radio, broadcasts entertainment and information to the campus and local communities. Students get hands-on practice with audio technology. They can produce and announce music programs, along with news, sports, etc. in a fashion that allows them to approximate the forms and practices of the practical industry. Students can develop a great deal of technical and practical competence that will hold them in good stead when applied in the professional world. But the

philosophical push of the station is decidedly more that of a laboratory. The approach is to emphasize familiarity rather than practical proficiency. And within this overlay, this student-directed and operated station, with faculty advisorship, has the permission to develop new program approaches and allow for personalized media expression.

The radio station is operated as a cocurricular arm of the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences. As with any course in the department, students from across campus are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the radio operation. Students of varying majors take advantage of this opportunity to participate in media. Of the some 160 students involved, no more than half are actual communication majors. Of course, with only so many broadcast hours in a week, all students do not get assigned a regular on-air show on demand. But in keeping with an all-comers philosophy, all students can become involved in the station's operation, even if at first in an off-air capacity. Students work in traditionally based radio departments -- music, news, sports, production, and promotion. Students receive no academic credit for their participation, but their transcripts will reflect satisfactory participation for each semester they are involved. A core of twelve students serves on a board of directors and head the various departments. They receive a small stipend each month for their administrative duties, but no staffers are compensated for on-air, production, or writing work. This framework clearly meets the needs of reform in mass communication education. It

allows the access, experimentation, and personalization expected in the laboratory setting. (More discussion of these aspects will be provided below.) It provides media familiarization as an educational opportunity to the entire student community, but it does not demand professional competence, or fill up the communication studies curriculum with practical work at a campus media outlet.

Laboratory characteristics have surfaced in a variety of fashions throughout the radio station. A review of several program categories can help to illustrate this point.

Music programming

The station's music programming normally consists of a rotation of alternative, college music fare. But program blocks are reserved during each day for what are called "specialty shows." These shows, submitted to and approved by the student board of directors, are highly sought. A student, or group of students, being awarded such a specialty block will then program that block each week during the semester. These shows are designed to allow students to program according to a theme or music type that they personally want to express. The idea is that student programmers are not saddled with the constraints of structured, sound consistency, as found in the professional, commercial radio world. Students have created shows that program urban music, for example, or big band, jazz, country, classical, or heavy metal. Other shows have taken on a more cerebral approach. For example, specialty

shows have programmed music that focused on social concerns. Another program has featured music, discussion, and news about international affairs. Yet another, entitled "Celestial Sewer," was designed to present off-beat artists and commentary for the off-beat listener. This approach seems to demonstrate that all radio campus radio stations need not follow the cookie cutter approaches modeled by the industry. Audiences in this context will support diverse program types.

Information programming

Information programming is also implemented in a fashion that allows students substantial opportunity to express themselves on issues they find relevant and significant. Hourly newscasts allow presentation of longer format news stories than would be found in a commercial station. Student reporters take the time to report what they feel are the important aspects of any story, overlooking the headline format found in most professional radio operations. Mini-documentaries or special reports, in even longer formats, are sometimes aired during newscasts.

In what is becoming a radio industry arity, students each semester produce program length (10 - 15 minutes or more) documentaries on topics they find important to themselves and their audiences. Topics in recent semesters have included eating disorders, illiteracy, town and gown relations, campus race relations, local economic development, and campus security issues. The programs have generated significant impact, at times. But more

important, the research, interview, scripting, and production process has helped students learn about an issue they find important, and how their message can be effectively disseminated to an audience.

The station also sponsors a commentary series that encourages station staffers and any other member of the campus community to analyze and/or critique a matter of personal concern. Commentaries usually run two to three minutes and air during the early morning and late afternoon time blocks. This type of program, again, allows students a framework in which to self-express through mediated communication. The topics, as would be expected, represent the diversity of views found on any campus, including social concerns, university governance, and national political matters.

Students have also served as panelists and moderators for live broadcasts of area political debates that have included candidates for federal offices and all the way down to municipal positions. The station broadcasts live convocation speeches when deemed appropriate, and on occasion follows up with post-speech discussion and analysis in interviews with university faculty members. It is clear that, in this setting, "breaking the format" is not the concern it would be in a practical setting. But this program flexibility keeps with a laboratory philosophy that allows for unique approaches and experimentation in format.

Public service and public affairs

Two student directors with a personal interest in generating more awareness of the AIDS problem last year used the radio medium in meeting this end. They developed and executed a week-long series of programs and events that raised money for a local AIDS foundation and generated cross-media interest from around the region. The on-air effort included news reports, public affairs interviews, public service announcements, and live broadcasts of special campus speakers addressing the topic of AIDS. The off-air effort included distribution of literature, a fund-raising fun run, and a chapel service. The significant aspect of this sort of effort is that the initiative of students is allowed to take hold. Authorship of the campaign and its messages clearly belong to the respective students. Although many of the methods of this campaign would not be considered experimental or form-breaking in the laboratory sense, the overall scope of the campaign and the creative access provided to students do fit into the laboratory philosophy.

Other such efforts have included audience-participation public affairs programs on a number of news and sports matters. Another audience participation series one semester featured trivia contests and highlights of the entertainment world. Audience participation has even been extended to allowing representatives of living units to program and announce an hour block of time in exchange for that living unit's participation in a radio station philanthropy.

CONCLUSION

One of the deviations from laboratory philosophy at this radio station has been the lack of multi-media opportunities. In a pure laboratory setting, opportunities exist for experimentation and work with a wide range of media. But those avenues are currently being developed on campus with the growth of a new student cable television operation and the planned birth of what will be called a "Creative Center," a truly multi-media facility where students will be encouraged to push themselves and technology as far as they wish in terms of personalized expression. This creative facility will essentially serve as a research and development arm of media experience on campus. Products produced there will perhaps find their way into the established student media organizations, or even into other venues for public dissemination on campus.

Overall, the workshop overlay with laboratory form and content initiatives has proven to be successful in this particular university context and for this particular radio station. Students from across the campus have the opportunity in engage in self-expression on all kinds of issues that really matter to them, from public policy matters to the latest popular music performers. They also are exposed to how a media organization can serve to accomplish their objectives. This approach has built substantial campus interest and commitment to the radio medium. The radio station has even been cited in a national college selection book as being a center for student involvement on this particular campus. The participation of a variety of majors has been

instrumental in several ways. It generates the support of faculty from other departments whose own majors can be involved in a useful cocurricular venture. Students who will not necessarily seek media careers learn about mediated messages in a fashion that is sure to make them more media literate and consequently more effective consumers of media. And the station itself benefits from the input of students who study economics, sociology, political science, music, education, and other disciplines. Their perspectives, particularly in news and public affairs programming, have proven to be instrumental in the station's content success and in carrying out the station's philosophy.

One could question whether the same objectives could be accomplished in a student media organization that seeks mainly to provide practical competencies in preparation for the professional world. Perhaps. But it would seem the very nature of this different mission would necessarily limit the sorts of involvement and types of expression encouraged in a more laboratory oriented operation. It is worth noting that the radio station profiled above has been recognized on a number of occasions in awards competitions sponsored by both student and professional media organizations. Frequently, the judges have complimented the award-winning programs for their innovation in approach and content. Such innovation is possible in an environment where personal authorship is permissible.

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